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Washingtonian: Magazine on the Make

By Judy Flander

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Washingtonian is an 8-year-old "city" magazine mostly owned by Laughlin Phillips, scion of a four-generation Washington family, and edited by former newspaperman Jack Limpert, a late arrival on the Washington scene who is making up for lost time.

There are more than 30 city magazines nationwide, as chauvinistic as their names imply — *New York*, *Philadelphia*, *San Diego*, *Detroit*, are a few. Many are published by Chambers of Commerce, and sound like it. Some are something else. *New York*, with a circulation of 340,000, is urbane, creative, well-edited and as well-written as only a magazine drawing from the top layer of New York writers could be. *Philadelphia* probably comes second, both in circulation (95,000), and in the quality of its features and its style.

Washingtonian (circulation 50,000), as a close runner-up, is a financially successful brew of sex, service, media critiques and gossip, including an extensive muckraking piece whenever a writer with-a-mission can get the Fund for Investigative Journalism to subsidize his research.

FOR A RECENT article in which Harvey Katz rated judges (Judge John Sirica of Watergate fame scored a zero), *Washingtonian* paid Katz \$500 for the piece, and the Stern Foundation put up \$1,500 more, according to Phillips, who thinks investigative journalism is "a splendid field for foundations."

The sex, which is strategically placed between pieces on where to get your dog shampooed and how to find a gynecologist who understands women, runs heavily to singles bars and massage parlors and, more often than not, inspires the front cover.

One cover had a man gazing lasciviously upward, framed between a pair of widespread net-stockinged legs. It heralded an article that combines both sex and service, "Take It Off." This guide for male readers is a rundown of strippers and strip joints, illustrated with pictures of bare bottomed and bare breasted dancers.

One of *Washingtonian's* top investigative reporters bemoans such "slick, meaningless stuff. They haven't had a fully clothed person on their cover in five months." While this is an exaggeration, there is some indication that *Washingtonian's* publishers have decided that sex sells.

THE AUGUST issue had a story on dieting, "How You Can Take Some of It Off" (not to be confused with the earlier article, Approved For Release 2004/09/03 : CIA-RDP88-01314R000300410005-3

shows a woman who is barely able to keep her size 20 pants from sliding off her nearly-nude size 6 body. She is half-standing on a scale to get across the weight-watching theme, but the look on her face is pure *Playboy* centerfold.

One of *Washingtonian's* writers observes that Limpert and Phillips "are not the grooviest people around, they're not the *Playboy* type."

They're not. Both are tall, slender, middle-aged, distinguished looking and all business. Limpert has a thin, austere face, a shock of white hair with a cowlick over the brow and a manner some call arrogant, others calculating. He has been referred to as "serpentine, and cool as a cucumber — a cobra," by one acquaintance. Another warns, "All I can say is don't turn your back on him."

A former staff member found Phillips an enigma. "He seems like a quiet guy who doesn't know what's going on. But he is a master at letting others do his hatchet work." Phillips is affable compared to Limpert, but he, too, is not the kind one would expect to cut capers at a Georgetown cocktail party.

Limpert, who was hired in 1969 as *Washingtonian's* managing editor, was for eight years a reporter and editor variously for UPI and newspapers in Detroit and California. He had a stint with the ill-fated Hubert H. Humphrey presidential campaign and as editor of the short-lived D.C. Examiner, O. Roy Chalk's tilt with Washington's newspaper establishment.

Limpert and Phillips may not be playboys, but their magazine is grossing \$1.1 million this year, according to their red-bearded publisher Richard Contee.

CONTEE SAYS *Washingtonian* was out of the red for the first time last year, and until then it had cost \$800,000 over the years to keep it going. "That's a lot of money," says "Loc" Phillips, "when you're practically putting it all in yourself." He is the magazine's editor and major stockholder and also director of the Phillips Gallery of Art, founded by his father, the late Duncan Phillips.

Contee, as publisher since 1968, has been overseeing the business side of the magazine. But he won't be much longer. He recently quit cold with no plans for his next job and will leave Jan. 18. His official explanation is that he has accomplished what he set out to do — make the magazine a financial success — and the challenge is over. However, he will remain on the board of directors, Phillips notes.

Since he gave notice, Contee has taken on a "short-term job," working in the re-election campaign of Sen. Charles McC. Mathias, R-Md.

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